

December 2015

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## “If My People”

It may be Iowa, but it could be more than just a field of dreams.

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

--2 Chronicles 7:14

The 2016 partisan delegate selection process officially begins the evening of February 1 when voters in Iowa will be invited to local schools, churches, and other public meeting halls to officially endorse a candidate they hope will be the next President of the United States. While Republicans experienced a modest turnout of some 121,000 caucus attendees in 2012, insiders anticipate upwards of 155,000 elephant lovers to be on hand this go-round.

Playing no small part in this year’s Iowa presidential sweepstakes, is a committed band of evangelicals headquartered in Urbandale, Iowa, a stone’s throw north and west of Des Moines. Perhaps at any other time, local corn might be the shop talk. One might even tease, “Can there any good thing come out of Urbandale?” Simple answer? Yes. Or as Philip responded to Nathanael concerning Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:46)—“Come and see.”

This particular band of evangelicals call themselves *The Family Leader*. In addition to registering new voters, and introducing God-fearing presidential candidates to pastors and church audiences in every nook and cranny of their state, they have initiated a prayer movement that is swiftly spreading beyond the banks of the Mississippi to the east and the Missouri River to the West.

While our Urbandale friends discern, like so many others, that America is in grave danger, they have captured our attention for their willingness to lead—sword in one hand, trowel in the other. They remind us of the unlikely community of believers who touched off America’s second “Great Awakening” in the early 19th century.

One of the roughest places in early America was Logan County, Kentucky. Historian Peter Marshall, Jr., says, “Technically, it was under United States law, even before Kentucky was admitted to the Union in 1796. The trouble was, no one on the frontier was designated to enforce the law, with the result that, as Congress would state, ‘the immunity which offenders experience attracts as to an asylum, the most vile and abandoned criminals, and at the same time deters useful and virtuous persons from making settlements in such society.’ (Think San Francisco). “Logan County attracted so many murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters...that it was nicknamed *Rogues’ Harbor* by the outlaws who fled there to escape justice back east.”<sup>1</sup>

That isn’t to say there were not at least some virtuous people living in the region that planted a few tiny churches and tried to deal with the lawlessness. Peter Cartwright, a local who grew up in Logan County, recalled that “Those who favored a better state of morals were called ‘Regulators.’ But they encountered fierce opposition from the ‘Rogues,’ and a battle was fought with guns, pistols, dirks, knives and clubs, in which the Regulators were defeated.”<sup>ibid</sup>

In the course of time, God raised up a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian preacher, and put it in his heart to move to Rogues' Harbor. James McGready was a tough, yet plain-spoken man, who wore buckskin breeches like any other frontiersman. And he didn't hesitate to tell anyone who would listen, that experiencing "new birth" was both necessary and urgent. While it is said McGready painted a picture of heaven and its glories in such a manner that many who heard his messages longed to be there, he also, like Jonathan Edwards, portrayed hell and its horrors so disturbingly, that people would "tremble and quake, imagining a lake of fire and brimstone yawning to overwhelm them..." <sup>ibid</sup>

As the Lord is wont to do, He raised up three small congregations (home groups) for McGready in 1797, a year before he arrived. They were located on three rivers; the Muddy, the Red, and the Gasper. McGready asked his new flocks to consider a covenant, part of which read:

"When we consider the Word and promises of a compassionate God, to the poor lost family of Adam, we find the strongest encouragement for Christians to pray in faith –to ask in the name of Jesus for the conversion of their fellow men...With these promises before us, we feel encouraged to unite our supplications to a prayer-hearing God, for the out-pouring of His Spirit, that His people may be quickened and comforted, and that our children, and sinners generally, may be converted." <sup>ibid</sup>

Covenant signers agreed to pray every Saturday evening and Sunday morning and to devote the third Saturday of each month to prayer and fasting. Rev. McGready made it clear that the focus of this concerted prayer campaign was for the Lord to cause a religious awakening in the county.

Within a year, things began to happen. Some of Logan County's most notorious sinners became ashamed and wept bitterly. But McGready told his folks that these were but "a few scattering drops before a mighty rain..." <sup>ibid</sup> Indeed, there were a lot more drops in June of 1800 as more than five hundred people showed up for the quarterly communion services at the Red River church, including other ministers who had heard that, like the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was being poured forth. Some traveled more than one hundred miles to be in attendance. On the last day of the four-day celebration, the dam seemed to break as the floods of salvation swept the assembly. Many were crying, "What shall we do to be saved?"

Later that summer at Muddy River, Rev. McGready experienced similar crowds and results, leading him to issue an appeal for those planning to attend the Gasper River four-day sacramental meeting to bring wagons and supplies. It was sound planning because ten thousand showed up! (The biggest city in the state, Lexington, more than a hundred miles away claimed fewer than eighteen hundred inhabitants).

Among the many preachers who came to experience the outpouring, was Rev. Barton Stone who served two congregations halfway across the state in Bourbon County. He was not disappointed. As word of the revival fires spread to neighboring states, Rev. Stone returned home to Cane Ridge with plans to organize a camp meeting for the following summer.

Days before his "camp meeting," wagons began arriving. Trees were felled, benches fashioned, and no-less-than seven platforms were erected around the perimeter of the clearings to accommodate a host of Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist evangelists who had been invited to preach. But, no one knew that more than twenty-five thousand were coming. America's Second Great Awakening was about to unfold.

The rest of this story is archived on our web site. (See "The Rogues and the Regulators," December 2009). Meanwhile, for those who would like to link up with *The Family Leader* in Urbandale, send a text message to (515) 393-2782. In the message box insert "If7:14." Twice daily at 7:14 Central Time, you will receive a reminder to pray. This morning's message read, "In Luke 5, Jesus said, 'Follow me...I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' We are invited to a changed life!"

Thank you, good friends, for your longtime loving and loyal support. Blessings for a prosperous New Year.

*Rick Forcier*

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, Peter, Jr./Manuel, David, From Sea to Shining Sea, Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, 1986, pgs.60-63