

*"They came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest."*

Some things never change.

One's position in society in Jesus' day was everything. It determined your friends, your living situation, your power. That's why I think that the more things change the more they stay the same. I think you would agree with me that for many, jockeying for position is just as important in our lives today as it was 2000 or so years ago in Nazareth.

It's a dog eat dog world out there. If you think about it—that phrase can actually conjure up some pretty nasty pictures. And for the Fry household—that picture is even more vivid.

You see, we used to own two dogs.

One dog was a big, black lab. We got her when Zoe was a toddler. Having one dog—especially one as sweet as a lab—is a treat. Dogs love you wholeheartedly, they always forgive you, they try and protect you—sometimes when you don't even think you need it—and they're always glad to see you.

Then we got another dog. That made: **two** dogs. Did you know that "dog" spelled backwards is "god?" You may not know that, but the dogs sure do.

Two dogs are a lot more challenging than one dog. So challenging—in fact—that we had to do quite a bit of reading on the psychology of dogs and their social behavior.

Dogs, as many of you undoubtedly know, operate under a pack mentality. Dogs are consumed with the issue to dominance. They need to know which member of the pack is #1.

Our family was the pack. Both dogs knew that they were outranked by every human in our family. Both dogs relished the fact that they outranked the cat. And both dogs knew that the oldest, biggest dog—our lab—was the Alpha dog: the #1 ranking dog in the family.

That is—they knew that until the puppy reached "doggy puberty." Doggie puberty is evidently just as challenging to dogs as people puberty is to teenagers and parents—and for all the same reasons.

Our younger dog decided to assert his independence and challenge the big dog for the #1 slot.

It started out small: little nips at dinner, trying to get in and out of the door first, wanting attention before the big dog, chasing the big dog off her bed.

The youngest dog began all these things—naturally—while we were here in Maine-- on vacation, and we had a dog sitter.

You can imagine our astonishment when we returned from vacation, went to feed them that first night back—only to have the dogs erupt into a huge dog fight. It was loud. No blood, fortunately, but lots of sound and fury that shook all of us up.

It's a dog eat dog world, and we all want to be #1.

We are inundated with messages telling us we need to be #1. Our children are urged to be the BEST in school, get the highest grades, to compete for the #1 slot in their classes. You would expect this to happen when kids are in high school, and they are vying for the valedictorian slot. But I have heard teachers, and parents, pressuring children to excel, to win, to be #1—from earlier and earlier ages.

Churches are not immune. Churches compete to be #1 in their area, and denominations jockey for people like we're in some sort of competition to be #1—and the church with the most people wins!

The nations of the world jockey for power and try to become the #1 superpower. Or at least the most powerful.

TV ratchets this rhetoric up a notch: America's Got Talent, The Voice, World of Dance—have made millions on this quest to be #1. Being good at something isn't good enough anymore—we have to be the best. We have to be #1.

But none of these things are #1— not churches, not power, not people. God is. God IS the BIG DOG. (I'm not calling God a dog. Now, I don't want to hear rumors next week about Lisa calling God a dog.—It's a metaphor!)

But the metaphor works. God is the big dog, and we are like the puppy—always jockeying for that slot—trying to make ourselves the most important thing in the household of God.

You'll be happy to know that everything turned out fine in our home. The big dog won the battle. Through word and deed we let the younger dog know that the big dog outranked him. And here's the weird thing: the younger dog was not at all unhappy with the #2 slot. It seems that in the animal world, animals just need to know where they stand, and the younger dog got confused for a couple of weeks. He was perfectly happy to step down off his shaky perch and let the Big Dog lead.

That was fascinating to me—finding out that animals don't need to be #1, they just need to know where they stand. We could learn a lot from our animals.

Jesus told his disciples that it didn't matter who was #1. "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all"-- not jockey for the top position. We need to let go of the controls occasionally, and let GOD lead.

Excelling at something, being good at something – those are great goals. But being number 1? Overrated. Take a lesson from our puppy, and let the Big Dog lead. Amen.