***1 John 3:16-18 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.***

This coming week many will celebrate Valentine’s Day. Valentine’s Day’s namesake, St Valentine, as history remembers him, was a doctor, as well as a priest. When the Roman authorities outlawed weddings, St Valentine defied the law and continued to marry, even under the threat of death. As a result, he was imprisoned and sentenced to die. While imprisoned, he helped the jailer’s blind daughter with lessons. Just before execution, legend has it that he wrote her a note encouraging her to maintain her studies and to stay close to Jesus. Thus, this became the first Valentine’s Day card. He loved his jailer and his jailer’s daughter, though he was a death row prisoner. Jesus doesn’t call us to lay down our life in service when it suits us, when it’s convenient, when we’re happy, when that person straightens up and acts like I expect… No, He calls us to lay down our lives even for those that are persecuting us. Many a marriage, many a relationship, many a family is in trouble right now because we’re not loving as Jesus loves. Service is the act of laying down our life for another. Seeking to serve, not to be served.

 Verse 16 says - *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*The Apostle John is recalling for us the words of Jesus in John 15:12-13 *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends*. Jesus laid down His life; therefore, we are to lay down our life. How do we do that most often? In service. We know love, the Greatest Love, because we have seen it in Jesus. Before Jesus, we didn’t know what true love is. We had no perfect example. We know now He loved us while we were yet still sinners… before we got our act together. Likewise, we are to love our brothers and sisters, our neighbors, those who may come to Christ by our witness in this same way. Our challenge is not His Spirit, but our Self. The problems in every relationship are centered on one word – Self. The Bible says – Esteem others above self. My friends, self-service belongs at the gas pump, not in our relationships. Self will never serve you well in relationships.

 Verse 17 *But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* The Apostle James says something very similar in James 2:15-17 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?****17****Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* Faith without works is dead. Service is our Faith at work. John takes it a step further – how does the love of God abide in him? The answer is – it doesn’t, it can’t. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the desire to love and serve one another comes as naturally as breathing. The road of Self leads to loneliness, bitterness, sadness, and emptiness. Only in serving God by serving others do we find true purpose.

 Verse 18 *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*Love cannot be in word alone. It must be action – deed and truth. We cannot be surrendered and submitted to God and ignore the suffering of our neighbor. Colossians 3:14 says *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.* God blesses us with money, talents, time, and love. Each requires a greater level of personal investment. Each draws us into a more sacrificial relationship when we give them to our brothers and sisters. Love is the most vulnerable and sacrificial action of all, and Colossians tells us it is the bond of perfection. Loving in deed and in truth is service in motion.

 This week, we all know someone that feels alone, forgotten, unloved. We all know a shut in. We all know someone sick. We all know someone struggling to make ends meet. What a perfect time to live out this scripture! To be love in action. Service isn’t talking about it or telling someone else to do it. God will never lay on your heart what He expects someone else to do. Who might we serve this week? It may be across the county, across the street, or inside your own home. Who might we serve and show the love of Jesus this week?