



March 14, 2018

THE WILL OF GOD

I recently heard the comedian John Oliver describe how he was an adolescent when he decided that the church had nothing for him. In an interview on Fresh Air, Oliver recalled how a number of his classmates had died at that time, and the wisdom that he received at church was that God's will is difficult to understand. If the deaths of children are God's will, Oliver thought, then he wanted nothing to do with church.

Let's be clear: pain, illness, and untimely deaths are never God's will.

I believe that most theological mistakes of this kind are made with good intentions, when people think that it is comforting to suggest that loss is a part of some larger, as-yet-unknown plan for good. The person who tried to comfort John Oliver with the idea that this is all part of God's will was probably making a clumsy attempt to assure him of the steadfast love of God, whose faithfulness binds up the broken and restores every loss.

*Last week, WBUR published a piece by Megan Devine, author of a book titled *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand*. Watching the reaction of the country to the shooting in Parkland, Florida, she saw too many messages that appealed to the grieving community to "stay strong." She wrote, "It isn't*

easy, but if we really want to support a grieving person, we've got to listen to his or her pain, rather than try to correct it."

God does not send people into the valley of the shadow of death. God leads us through the valley when we have to walk that way, and brings us out the other side. The journey through grief is not quick or easy. But we may be assured that we do not walk it alone.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister