



The Waters Encompass Me
By
David Jones 1926

Reflection

T. S. Eliot called English painter and poet **David Jones** (1895-1974) one of the finest writers and thinkers of his generation. World War I was the defining event of his youth. The death and destruction he saw during his three years in the trenches of France haunted him for the rest of his life. He endured two serious nervous breakdowns and spent his later years confined to his home, battling the fears of agoraphobia. Like Vincent Van Gogh, painting, poetry and faith in God kept him alive and reasonably sane.

The Book of Jonah captivated him and in 1926, Jones completed 13 woodblock etchings to illustrate the story. "*Your Waters Encompass Me*" depicts chapter 2. As Jonah sank into the watery realm of the deep, he raised his hands to cry out for help. The image of Jonah is almost identical to the **image of Jesus** on the cross used by Jones in a crucifixion etching he had done earlier. Might it remind us of what Jesus said, "As Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and nights."

Where is God in the moment of trial? Jones used the image of a **broken tree** that touched Jonah's left shoulder. Jones never forgot the devastated forests he saw in France. Broken trees became for him a symbol of his wounded God who witnessed human cruelty and suffered on our behalf.

Unbeknown to Jonah, help was on the way in the top right corner of the etching. The menacing teeth of a marauding **sea monster** about to gobble a jellyfish was also about to eat Jonah. But calamity became his lifeline. So it is today. Some endure the scourge of chemotherapy or humbly confess their sins to another and receive life in return.

Finally, though Jonah experienced the **deep dark sea** as a place of desperation and death, Jones depicted it as teeming with life. In addition to the jellyfish and sea monster, he included six fish, four eels, one shrimp, one snail, and fresh seaweed. The etching suggests that in the moment of crisis, transformation may just be around the corner. It was for Jonah. Might it be for us as well?