Isaiah 55:12-13 Joy and Peace, and God is in charge.

And the background if you are interested: It took me a week of experimentation to make this painting work. I don't dream because of one of the medications I take, and most unusually, twice that week I have woken from a 10 minute sleep to find myself in the midst of a complex, vivid and colourful dream, of mountains in a howling gale.

And the reason why the howling gale was in my mind is simple, I have been grappling all week with this technically difficult painting. I know what the painting is supposed to look like because it has been in my head. I had been thinking about how else to represent the Holy Spirit, other than a dove, and was very conscious that the Hebrew (ruach) and Greek (pneuma) words for spirit mean breath or wind. I had recalled a bible verse I thought was either in one of the psalms or Isaiah, about the trees clapping their hands, and so I had been thinking about this when the gales came. I was soon inspired by watching our 10 metre tall multi-trunk bay tree writhing in the gale the other day and the branches clapping into each other, the tree truly clapping its hands!

And so I went looking for the verse and discovered a botanist's delight and some words that brought back very strong memories. I have heard mountains sing and it is an awesome experience. As a student at Bangor in North Wales, I often went climbing and walking in the Welsh mountains. One snowy day, and an unforescast 80 mph gale found me lying horizontally on the ridge between the 2nd and 3rd tallest mountains in Snowdonia, Carnedd Llewelyn and Carnedd Dafydd, held onto the mountain only by my fingers wedged into a crack in the rock, the entire landscape vibrating to this incredible thrilling, terrifying long, drawn out howl. Eventually the wind eased off for long enough for me to get a bearing on Tryfan across the Ogwen Valley, and plot a safe route down over the smaller peak of Pen yr Ole Wen mountain, all the time with this howling coming and going - it was a day when I was lucky to survive.

So, I had a picture forming in my head of trees along a ridge clapping their hands, and a backdrop of mountains with snow blown from the tips in plumes, emitting their long deep howling song… Above, cirrus wind clouds in the sky and below, spray blown up the valleys between ridges from wind blown waves. The foreground, a fairly secluded valley behind the hand-clapping trees on the ridge, with cypress and juniper trees on the sloping valley sides, Cypress sempervirens is the familiar tall thin Italian cypress and a wider form also, both uncommon and possibly introduced in Israel, whereas there are six juniper species, some very common, in Israel, so I included some of each. Common myrtle (Myrtis communis) is an aromatic white flowered shrub which likes moist valley floors and is common in Israel, though not native to the UK. I think that I have seen it on my travels but my memory for plants is not what it was. The unrelated bog myrtle (Myrica gale) found in UK wetlands needs cooler conditions than those found in Israel.

Just about everything in this painting was an experiment. I had a pile of bits of painting that did not fit together. Gradually I started assembling various configurations and slowly it became clear how the painting was supposed to work. And work it does. Isaiah 55 is a tremendously inspirational chapter in the bible, beginning with covenant promises referring obliquely to the messiah, rather as Jesus himself did when talking about living bread and springs of water rising to eternal life. The reference to the good news being for all nations is immensely reassuring. As is the emphasis on forgiveness for prodigal people who turn back to God, plus the none too gentle reminder that God is awesome and wonderful and perfect. And that every word he sends out into the world is done with a purpose (again, since Logos, word, is used for Jesus, perhaps an oblique reference to the messiah.)

All leading up to that magnificent picture of joy and peace, of the mountains singing and the trees clapping their hands, and as symbols of God’s commitment to people forever, the cypress (or juniper) and the myrtle. And so to a very thoroughly experimental painting. I have never tried to represent spray before, waves only once, never trees clapping their hands, essentially a flight of fancy inspired by a bay tree flailing about on a windy day, never snow blowing from singing mountains although that I have at least experienced. And as for the cypress, juniper and myrtle, there was a distinct shortage of easily available images, so a great deal of cutting out and then trying to deal with the blue sky round the edges of the cut out conifers, as well as finding a way of using all the available public domain images of myrtle, none of them wildly suitable for the job... Under the circumstances, I'm pleased with the result.

Love from Rick. Artist in Residence Under The Thinking Tree