

I have to say, every time I read this passage I feel really sorry for Simon's mother-in-law. No sooner is she made better than she immediately gets back to the business of looking after everyone else – a situation which many mums can identify with, I'm sure!!

Having begun his ministry by calling the first four disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, Jesus sets about the next key aspect of his ministry, namely, healing. First Jesus heals the man in the synagogue who was possessed, then he heals Simon's mother-in-law of her fever.

We may wonder what was really wrong with her? What kind of fever is it that can be cleared up so quickly? What kind of physician is Jesus who heals by taking his patient by the hand?

Perhaps there was something more than just the physical going on here. Perhaps Jesus recognises that there was something of the complex relationship between body, mind and soul afflicting this woman, which Jesus then sought to address.

Today we recognise more than we did a generation ago, perhaps, the relationship between these different aspects of people; with physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, indigestion, aches and pains often being caused, for example, by stress.

We all know only too well the psychological and spiritual impact which a spell in hospital can have on people. Apart from the wide-ranging impact of having the usual flow of one's life interrupted and the feelings of helplessness and vulnerability of being in unfamiliar surroundings, as well as anxieties about the illness itself, there is the sheer boredom of long hours spent waiting: waiting for doctors' visits, waiting for the results of tests, waiting for operations.

Yet, I'm sure we've all found that times of illness can often be opportunities for people to take stock of their lives and maybe start to recognise God's presence in a way which the usual busyness of life forces out. The experience of illness can help people acknowledge the reality that they cannot rely on their own strength, but that all strength, hope and courage comes from God, mediated through the skill, care and compassion of other people.

As we read the story of the way in which Jesus ministry took off like a rocket in Capernaum, where he is hounded by people seeking healing, we begin to see the central place which healing was to have in his ministry, and how preaching, teaching and healing were always connected to one another, with the purpose of enabling people to grow as human beings in a variety of ways.

The private healing of Simon's mother-in-law, following on from the public healing of the man in the temple just before it, both show us that these healings are not dependent on the faith of the recipients in either case but, rather, on the purposes which the healer had in mind. What they teach us is that God is present and active in situations of infirmity and is always working to bring about his healing purposes, whether we recognise him or not!