



Rising to Life: **Christian Public Witness in the Age of Coronavirus** A Web Talk Series for a *Life-Flourishing Economy, Ecology and Communities*

Covid-19 and Caste

Coronavirus has radically transformed the nature and meaning of the body of Christ. Due to lockdown, we are not able to meet as faith communities in our sanctuaries. But most of the churches tried to reach out to their faithful through online platforms and live-streamed worship services including the Eucharist. Online preaching has become a small-scale cottage industry thanks to the pandemic and lockdown. However, the casualty here is the *Ekklesia*, the community of disciples who are called out and commissioned to engage in public witness.

We might flatten the curve and return to normalcy. But we need to realize that the main culprit for the current crisis is this very “normalcy” that we have been faithfully practicing. This is an opportunity to destabilize the “normalcy” and contest our conventional models of being the church. Covid invites us to rediscover the church afresh in the context of the pandemic. We need to search for new forms of being the church.

To this end, the Council for World Mission is proposing a Web Talk Series and publications in different regions, around the theme, “Rising to Life: Christian Public Witness in the Age of Coronavirus.” The first Web Talk is for the South Asia region, and the topic is Coronavirus and Caste.

Covid 19 propagated several myths, and one of them is the myth of coronavirus as the great equalizer. Coronavirus does not discriminate. We are all in the same boat. There is no caste privilege in the age of coronavirus. However, the stories from South Asia contests this myth. Coronavirus has a caste in South Asia. When it comes to coronavirus, being a Dalit is not a pre-existing condition; but living in a casteist country is. Ignoring the question of how different levels of vulnerabilities are (re)produced during this crisis and focusing only on ‘social distancing’ and ‘self-isolation’ exposes the caste and class nature of our socio-epidemiological understandings. Further, the casteist

mindset considers Dalit lifestyle and occupations as “unhygienic” and “impure,” and we continue to involve in the game of victim-blaming. People practice casteism and untouchability even when they are in quarantine. People refuse to eat food touched and cooked by Dalit cooks. Lockdown will reinforce casteist values, ethos and practices. Coronavirus may go away, but there is no vaccine which can cure the disease of caste.

This Web Talk will bring together Dalit scholars, theologians and activists from South Asia to deliberate on this topic, and to enable the churches to engage in radical public witness, informed by the unheard and silenced voices.

Date and Time

Panel 1:

10 July 2020 (Friday) 5:00pm-7:00pm (IST)

Panel 2:

17 July 2020 (Friday) 5:00pm-7:00pm (IST)

You will receive a Zoom link when your registration is accepted.