In the middle of his sermon the Rabbi notices that one of his favorite congregants stands up and walks out.

Upset by this, the Rabbi calls him after Shabbat and asks him, "Sam why did you walk out in the middle of my sermon?"

Sam replies," Rabbi I went to get a haircut! Sam, you couldn't get it before my sermon?

Rabbi, I didn't need it then".

This will not be a long sermon, I don't have anything really left to say after the holidays, and I am going to presume you don't have anything left to hear.

That said I want to share a few thoughts on sermons themselves. But first another joke:

A rabbi and his wife were doing a bit of house cleaning. The rabbi came across a box he didn't recognize. His wife told him to leave it alone, that it was personal.

As soon as she was out of the house, his curiosity got the best of him. He opened the box, and inside found three eggs and a small bundle of dollar bills.

When his wife came home, he admitted that he opened the box, and he asked her to explain the contents to him.

She told him that every time he gave a bad sermon, she would put an egg in the box.

He interrupted, "In twenty years, only three bad sermons, that's not bad."

His wife continued, “And every time I got a dozen eggs, I would sell them for one dollar.”

One of the things that I like to do after the High Holy Days is to listen to, read or watch the High Holy Day sermons of my colleagues across North America.

Rabbis spend days/weeks preparing these thoughtful comments and teachings and we are so blessed in this modern connected age to be able to sample so many of them in almost real time.

There is also the artform of the whole thing. The sermon is a unique type of composition, designed to, as my homiletics professor in seminary taught, “to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

He also taught us that a sermon should have a beginning, a middle and an end and that none of those three elements should too far apart from each other.

In the 15th century book *Eine Haqore*, Joseph ibn Shem Tov tells of a self-regarding preacher. He began by telling the congregation that his talk would be divided into three parts: the first both he and they would understand. The second, only he would understand. The third, neither of them would understand. Shem Tov adds that most of the sermons he hears fall in the third category.

Sermons (or drashot) are as old as faith, and criticisms about sermons as old as sermons.

"A bad preacher, like the good rain, does not know when to stop," complained Emerson, voicing a sentiment shared by many congregants throughout the centuries. For Trollope, "There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilised and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons." Leon Modena in the 17th century said that there was thunder and lightning on Sinai because God knew that when Jews hear words of Torah, they fall asleep!

It is said that President Abraham Lincoln often slipped out of the White House on Wednesday evenings to listen to the sermons of Dr. Phineas Gurley at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.

He generally preferred to come and go unnoticed, so when Dr. Gurley knew the president was coming, he left his study door open. On one of those occasions, the president quietly entered through a side door of the church, took his seat in the minister's study, located just off the sanctuary, and propped the door open just wide enough to hear the preacher.

During the walk home one Wednesday evening, an aide asked Mr. Lincoln his appraisal of the sermon. The president thoughtfully replied, "The content was excellent... he delivered with elo-quence... he had put work into the message...."

"Then you thought it was an excellent sermon?" questioned the aide.

"No," Lincoln answered.

"But you said that the content was excellent, it was delivered with eloquence, and it showed much work," the aide pressed.

"That's true," Lincoln said. "But Dr. Gurley forgot the most important ingredient. He forgot to ask us to do something great."

Words can uplift, and they can sedate; sermons hopefully can do one more thing they can motivate us toward taking action in our lives and in our community. We don't have many mediums that can do that with authenticity and integrity. Politics is by nature divisive and partisan; pop culture and celebrity is vapid (they also told us not to use words people don't generally know), and academia, as insightful and illuminating as it may be can at the same time be inaccessible and off putting.

I guess my sermon tonight is simply this; listen to the sermons, ours or those of others, hear the carefully crafted messages the rabbis are trying to convey; not because of the rabbi themselves, but because of the unique voice that sermons can have in our lives.